What are your priorities for community safety?

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched a public consultation on the priorities for community safety in the borough and are asking residents, workers, visitors and businesses to have their say on the proposed action plan.

The council is part of the Epsom and Ewell Community Safety Partnership, which also includes Surrey Fire & Rescue Service, Surrey Police, Surrey County Council, Kent, Surrey and Sussex Probation Service, Surrey Downs Clinical Commissioning Group, Surrey Police & Crime Commissioner and Rosebery Housing Association.

Community safety covers a wide range of activities designed to reduce the likelihood of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour, protect victims and hold perpetrators to account. It also involves reducing incidents of domestic abuse and behaviour damaging to the community.

As part of the Epsom & Ewell Community Safety Partnership, the council have committed to playing its part in the following themes:

- 1. Focus on the most vulnerable or those at risk of harm
- 2. Serious organised crime and PREVENT
- 3. Identify and tackle crime and anti-social behaviour
- 4. Improve Community Engagement

The new Plan is the first time the council has publicly committed to actions in support of those themes and they would like to gather the views of the community.

Cllr **Alex Coley**, (RA Ruxley) Chair of the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee said: "I asked for this community safety action plan to go to a public consultation so we can hear what local people think our priorities should be. The government recently conducted a national consultation on expanded anti-social behaviour powers and the relationship between Community Safety Partnerships and Police & Crime Commissioners.

"Now it's time to ask what our local community want from the Council and our partners. Please tell us your community safety priorities and share with others so we hear from as many people as possible."

The consultation will run until 17 December 2023 and can be accessed via:

www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/council/consultations. Comments can be made by email to consultations@epsom-ewell.gov.uk

Surrey police station futures

No decisions have been made on the long-term future of Caterham or Reigate Police Stations as proposals put forward "are not fit for purpose" and "cost-prohibitive".

Front-desk services returned to Caterham, after a five-year absence, as an emergency measure following the discovery of dangerous crumbling concrete nine miles away and on the other side of the M25 at Reigate Police Station.

The problem was uncovered after Surrey Police began searching their estate for Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in September as the national emergency spread.

RAAC concrete can collapse and crumble without notice. It meant the force had to shift staff and officers out of Reigate including moving front-desk counter services to Caterham, and close CCTV monitoring.

Three weeks after the discovery, there is still no timetable to return, nor any updates on whether the switch will be made permanent.

A spokesperson for Surrey Police said Caterham remained operational and had previously housed a front-counter service but closed in 2018 to save money as part of a wider review into funding.

It was deemed expendable, the force said, due to a "decrease in footfall of front counter services".

They have yet to confirm whether the counter will stay in Caterham long term, move back to Reigate, find a new home completely, or shut.



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They said: "It seemed sensible to reinstate it at Caterham as it was once there until a long-term solution is found for the eastern division headquarters. Adding: "The front counter at Caterham Police Station will remain open until further notice, and we will update local residents as soon as any longer-term decisions have been made. The priority has been to maintain policing services while ensuring the health and safety of our officers, staff and visiting public."

As for Reigate, Surrey Police said they have explored a number of options for the continued use of either the whole or specific parts of the building, however, the proposals that have been put forward are not fit for purpose either for staff, or for victims to be able to report crime, and are also cost-prohibitive.

Related reports:

Reigate Police Station closes with a concrete problem

[Surrey Police's counter service in Epsom is located during normal business hours only within the Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom. Reigate Police Station's counter-service was open full-time, so from now out of hours personal attendances will have to go to Caterham or Staines or Guildford.]

Anti-Yob Cat protection petition

"Heartbroken" pet owners claim a group of teenagers are "trapping cats" for their dogs to "rip apart".

A petition signed by 3,675 people is calling for more action from the RSPCA and the police to stop the acts around Claygate and Chessington and surrounding areas.

Natalie Harwood, who started the petition, said her "beautiful" cat Frank had been killed, describing him as "the smallest, most gentle, loving, friendly cat" who was killed "in the worst way". She added: "We've had him since the day he was born, he was only two and a half years old and we are absolutely heartbroken."

A Surrey Police spokesperson confirmed there had been two reports of incidents involving cats being taunted or harmed by a group of boys around Surbiton Golf Club, but said there had been no arrests made. They said they were aware of ongoing concerns of anti-social behaviour in the area on and around the golf course, and were working closely with the Metropolitan Police to share information, given the area borders London.

The spokesperson said: "In both cases, it was reported that dogs were involved and chased the cats. Officers are conducting further enquiries and anyone who witnessed an attack on a cat or any other animal can get in touch."

They also said the force would be increasing police presence in the area, "specifically looking out for anti-social behaviour of any kind including animal welfare issues".

Ms Harwood told the LDRS she and her family spent two weeks searching the golf course after Frank went missing in October, before being told via an anonymous phone call that the beloved pet had been ripped apart by dogs. She said she'd had reports of boys "trying to pull cats from under cars", climbing trees to get a cat down, or using rakes trying to hit it down with their dogs "waiting at the bottom".

An RSPCA spokesperson said dog owners had a legal responsibility under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to keep their dog under control in a public place, and that this legislation was enforced by the police. They added: "This must have been a very upsetting and distressing incident for the owners of the cats mentioned and we are so sorry to hear they sadly lost their lives. We are concerned to hear about wildlife being targeted in this area."

Clint Whittaker, general manager at the golf club, said the club had reported trespassing issues to local police but nothing concerning animal welfare. He said the club had invested £100,000 in installing security fencing around a portion of its boundary but that it didn't cover all access points because of a public footpath running across the property.

Mr Whittaker added: "These incidents tend to occur outside of club operating hours, therefore we are only made aware from neighbours when they occur."

The change.org petition said such incidents had been happening in "Claygate, Chessington and surrounding areas for months." It also claimed people were "catapulting and shooting at all animals including cats, horses, foxes and deer".

The petition said: "There's witnesses, video footage and pictures of these boys and the things they are doing but the police and RSPCA don't do anything." The Met Police has been contacted for comment.

Surrey Police ask that anyone who has witnessed such incidents contact them quoting PR/45230118653. The RSPCA spokesperson said they would encourage anyone with serious concerns about animal welfare issues to contact the RSPCA

inspector line on 0300 123 8018 or the police.

Image: Frank the cat, a cat who went missing and whose owner Natalie Harwood started a petition calling for an end to animal cruelty after reports of a group of boys attacking

Reigate Police Station closes with a concrete problem

Officers and staff are being moved out of Reigate Police Station following the discovery of dangerous crumbly concrete inside the building. The move leaves CCTV of public spaces in Mole Valley unmonitored.

The public-facing police counter will also move to Caterham Police Station from Monday, October 30. Surrey Police said it carried out an investigation of its buildings for the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in September after the national scandal broke following its discovery in schools.

No specific timeframe is provided for how long officers will be moved from Reigate, as it depends on finding a permanent resolution for the issues with the building. The Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend said the move would be "A challenging time for our policing teams.

Structural engineers confirmed RAAC was used in the construction of Reigate Police Station. Distressed RAAC can suddenly collapse with no apparent warning. The majority of the dangerous concrete at the station is said to still be in good condition and is not an immediate risk but one external area was showing signs of distress - Surrey Police said in a release issued after questions from the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

The force immediately relocated staff and officers from the area in immediate danger, on the advice of engineers, to elsewhere in the police station, and installed supports to reinforce the roof. According to Surrey Police, this has now been signed off and can be reoccupied.

Engineers have also been instructed to carry out weekly checks on the rest of the station in order to allow its neighbourhood policing team to operate out of the station "until a longer-term solution can be found". The public-facing police counter will move to Caterham Police Station from Monday, October 30.

The station also monitors the public spaces CCTV camera for Mole Valley District Council. Surrey Police said it will no longer be able to continue this service with discussions ongoing over "potential technical solutions". A public consultation has also been launched on the future provision of CCTV in the area.

Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend: "I want to reassure our local communities across East Surrey that plans are already in place to ensure the policing service they receive will not be affected by the situation at Reigate Police Station. The safety of the public and our officers, staff and volunteers must be the most important consideration and I fully support the prompt action being taken by the force to vacate the majority of the building.

"This, of course, is a temporary measure, and my office will work closely with the chief constable and his team to ensure that we can find a long-term solution for the future of our Eastern Divisional HQ as quickly as possible. This is a challenging time for our policing teams based at Reigate, but they are incredibly resilient in the face of adversity, and I want to thank them all on behalf of the public for their patience and understanding whilst we deal with this issue."

Other police teams will work remotely or from alternative sites where possible. The police insist the changes will not impact service levels expected from the force.

Temporary assistant chief constable for local policing, Alison Barlow, said: "The health and safety of our staff, officers, volunteers, and the public is of paramount importance and the force responded swiftly following the identification of RAAC at Reigate Police Station.

"In the short-term some teams, including our Neighbourhood Policing Teams, who spend much of their time away from the police station patrolling and attending calls for service, remain in the area of Reigate police station with prop-supports in place whilst longer-term options are explored, and those teams who are office-based and can work remotely or from another police site are being supported to do so."

[Surrey Police's counter service in Epsom is located during normal business hours only within the Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom. Reigate Police Station's counter-service was open full-time, so from now out of hours personal attendances will have to go to Caterham or Staines or Guildford.]

To Catch a Bike Thief - not easy in Surrey

Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate and former Royal Military Police officer **Helen Maguire** has revealed that 991 bike theft cases in Surrey were closed in 2022 without a suspect being identified - 91.9% of total reported cases.



Meanwhile, only nine bike thefts reported in Surrey last year resulted in a suspect being charged or summonsed – just 0.8% of the total 1098 cases recorded.

Mrs Maguire claimed these figures showed the Government was effectively 'decriminalising' bike theft. She went on to say "This is letting criminals off the hook for the robbery of thousands of pounds worth of property".

She is calling for a return to proper community policing, where officers are visible and trusted and given time to focus on tackling local crime. She said, "The number of PCSOs has fallen in Surrey to just 69 by the end of March – down from 136 PCSOs just over a year ago in February 2022. It's worse in Epsom and Ewell where we should have eight and now have half of that number.

"Theft is such a personal and terrible crime. To see so many go unsolved in Surrey is a poor reflection on this government's record of reducing crime. We need to see a return to proper community policing, making our streets safer and ending this free-for-all for criminals."

In response a spokesperson for Surrey Police stated: "We appreciate how distressing it is to be a victim of any theft and our efforts remain ongoing to tackle bicycle theft as robustly as we can. We are also continuing to raise awareness of steps which can be taken to prevent these thefts from occurring in the first place by ensuring effective prevention measures are in place. More advice on protecting your bicycle can be found on our web site https://www.surrey.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/keeping-vehicles-safe/how-safe-is-your-bike/

"In some cases, there may not be enough intelligence or positive lines of enquiry for police to act on. This does not mean that a crime is closed indefinitely or that intelligence or information is ignored. This information will be collated and monitored to identify emerging crime hotspots and any trends or patterns.

"The public can also help in the pursuit of offenders by reporting suspicious activity, and also by reporting to the police those selling stolen property or those involved in burglary offences via 101, by webchat on our website https://surrey.police.uk/ online https://www.surrey.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/cor/tell-us-about-existing-case-report or anonymously via the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Residents are also able to upload video footage and images in relation to any suspicious activity through the use of a public CCTV submission portal here: https://surrey.police.uk/suspiciousactivityportal"

In response to Ms Maguire's statements about PCSOs Surrey Police stated: "We know how important a visible police team with local knowledge is to residents in each of our boroughs. A trusted, knowledgeable, and proactive local policing presence is just as important to us, and PCSOs are a valued and integral part of that. We are currently actively recruiting to increase our PCSO establishment level. If you wish to apply to join Surrey Police as a PCSO, you can apply here: https://www.surrey.police.uk/police-forces/surrey-police/areas/careers/careers/pcso/

"There are currently three full-time PCSOs and one part-time PCSO in Epsom and Ewell. The borough also has one rural PCSO who deals with rural matters."

Related reports:

Ex MPC, now Epsom PPC, tackles Surrey PCs

Police maintain order at Epsom Derby Festival

Image: cycles in Waterloo Road Epsom CC http://www.epsomcyclists.org.uk/parking/

Surrey's 999 services under one operator?

A review into Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner taking control of the county's fire and rescue service has been branded "a waste of time" and "unwarranted" by councillors.

The proposals could mean the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service would no longer be under the control of the county council, but councillors questioned the possible move at a time of "considerable change" in the service.

Councillors raised concerns at a meeting of the authority's communities, environment and highways select committee on Wednesday (July 5) that such a change had previously been ruled out, and that the review was a waste of money.

Lisa Townsend told the LDRS she was responding to central government proposals to reform fire and rescue services, and has commissioned an independent review to see if there would be any benefits of a change.

The Conservative PCC said this was not something she had "dreamt up overnight", but claimed the county council had made clear they wanted "no active part" in the work to look into the change.

Councillor **Denise Turner-Stewart**, deputy leader at Surrey County Council and cabinet member for communities and community safety, told the July 5 meeting a previous proposal put forward by former PCC David Munro showed there was "no significant benefit" to a change in governance. She said: "As far as I'm concerned, nothing has really changed since. There are no direct benefits that could be generated by a potential change. There is no mandate for a potential change."

She said the service had been through "considerable change" since an inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in 2018/19 found it required improvement, and was now in a "steady state".

Cllr **Turner-Stewart** said it would not be "beneficial or advantageous" to look at further changes for the service, and called the PCC's review "unwarranted and not legitimate".

Mrs Townsend said she had written to all MPs and to the county council's leader outlining the work she planned to undertake and the reasons behind it. She added: "This is government policy which I have been encouraged to consider. So I believe establishing an up-to-date understanding of the picture of fire and rescue governance in Surrey is an entirely prudent and legitimate exercise for me to carry out in the circumstances.

"I want to be clear that at this stage, this is purely a review. Any proposal to take on responsibility for the governance of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service would require the preparation of a full business case. This would be subject to extensive consultation prior to being submitted to the Home Office for any approval."

Cllr **Keith Witham** (Conservative, Worplesdon) told the meeting he had already made his views on the proposals known to the PCC. Saying he knew how much hard work had gone into improving the service in the past five years, Cllr Witham said a change would be "an entirely inappropriate, unnecessary distraction at this time".

He said: "It is a waste of time, a waste of her funds, for she is financing this investigation, and will be a distraction, unnecessarily."

Mrs Townsend said she had "no desire" to distract from progress made in the service but that a government white paper on future legislation was "imminent".

She told the LDRS: "[Government] have been clear they want to simplify and strengthen governance for fire services and if that process is to involve Police and Crime Commissioners, this review will ensure I am properly placed to make an informed decision for the Surrey public."

Met poaches Surrey police claims Commissioner

Surrey has more police officers than ever before despite attempts by the Met to "poach" officers, according to the county's Police and Crime Commissioner. **Lisa Townsend** told a meeting of the Police and Crime panel on Thursday (June 29) there were challenges around retention in the force and what was being done to address them.

But she said Surrey Police had beaten a government uplift target by 136 officers. Mrs Townsend described it as a "deliberate move" to over-recruit because officers in Surrey faced issues such as competitive wages and a high cost of living.

With the Met Police "offering quite large sums of money" to try to "poach" Surrey officers, Mrs Townsend pointed to targeted adverts on Surrey trains as one tactic used by the London force.

With 2,325 officers, she said the force was bigger than it had been before. Mrs Townsend spoke more than once in the meeting about the need for police to attend fewer non-critical mental health call outs.

She said "pushing forward" with work to reduce police attending such calls would help with both recruitment and retention in Surrey.

The commissioner said: "People are coming in [to policing] because they want to catch the bad guys, they want to prevent crime, they want to protect the public. Increasingly they are being asked to do what is social work, particularly around mental health and concerns for welfare."

Tandridge District Councillor **Richard Smith**, a former police officer, described officer retention as "like lemmings falling of a cliff". He claimed in most organisations senior management "won't tell the truth from what's being said at the bottom end of the company because it makes them look bad".

Mrs Townsend responded to say she spent a lot of time both with those at the top of the force and out on attachment with officers who she said she hoped were comfortable talking to her about the challenges. She said: "They do like to have a good whinge, and I am more than happy to listen. So I think we do have a pretty good grasp."

With 395 officers having joined the force since 2019, **Cllr Alex Coley**, a member of **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**, asked for the number of officers who had left in that period.

But Mrs Townsend didn't give an answer on how many had left the force, saying the "total uplift" was what really mattered and it was "totally normal" to lose officers to retirement and other factors. Her office committed to giving the number to Cllr Coley after the meeting.

Mrs Townsend outlined measures to keep officers including adding to the force's estates plan to provide more affordable homes, which 85 per cent of officers asked had said was important to them.

Image: Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Lisa Townsend at the Surrey Police and Crime Panel budget hearing

 $Image: Surrey\ Police\ and\ Crime\ Commissioner\ Lisa\ Townsend\ at\ the\ Surrey\ Police\ and\ Crime\ Panel\ budget\ hearing$

Confusing debate on police attending mental health calls

An ex-police officer has responded to **Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner**'s calls for coppers to attend fewer mental health call outs – saying the first murder he attended was initally a non-critical mental health call.

Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner, **Lisa Townsend**, recently called for officers to stop attending every mental health call out, saying officers are being taken off the front line. She has called for the "Right Care, Right Person" model to be introduced, following the Metropolitan Police also saying from August they will no longer attend mental health call outs where there is not a threat to life.

Councillor **Richard Smith**, a Tandridge District Councillor, said he had been a police officer for 30 years and that he was in agreement with Mrs Townsend's comments. (sic)

Cllr Smith (Residents' Alliance, Burstow, Horne & Outwood) spoke at the annual meeting of Surrey County Council's Police and Crime Panel on Thursday (June 29). He said: "Probably the first murder I went to was a non-critical [mental health] call to a



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person who then decided to stab the nurse to death with a carving knife out of the kitchen. I feel that's where we are going to come unstuck when it comes to removing police from mental health calls."

Mrs Townsend responded that was "absolutely the right place for police to be" and there would always be a role for police to play in such cases. But she said police officers should not be attending where there was a role for other agencies, such as adult social care or the NHS, to follow up.

Earlier in the meeting she had pointed to additional money given to the NHS for mental health support, which police don't get. But she was clear the police should not get additional money, in her opinion.

She said: "If somebody has broken their leg we would not expect them to be in the back of a police car. "If somebody is having a mental health crisis I do not want them in the back of a police car."

Mrs Townsend said she'd had "difficult" conversations with NHS representatives about police officers not being able to attend all mental health calls.

She told the meeting the difference was: "I'm not walking into A&E in St Peter's on a Friday night saying can we borrow a couple of nurses because we have got some burglaries that need solving in Woking?"

She said in February, officers spent 515 hours on incidents relating to mental health which was the highest number of hours ever recorded in a single month by **Surrey Police**.

Image: Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey Lisa Townsend. Surrey Live photographer Darren Pepe

Anonymity justified by acquittal?

A service Surrey Police officer who allegedly 'harassed two female colleagues' has been cleared of misconduct. The hearing's chairperson said they had looked into allegations that a police constable carried out a series of acts of harassment against two female officers but misconduct thresholds had not been proven, or were not reached.

The police officer, who has not been named and is referred to as "PC X", escaped sanctions after the five day hearing which took place last week at the force's Guildford HQ.

[Image is illustration only - it is not the officer in question.]

PC X was accused of "shouting" at an officer during the first coronavirus lockdown, and attempted to hug another officer twice despite being warned about his behaviour.

Summing up, chairperson Eileen Herlihy said that on July 3, 2020, PC X got involved in a work-place argument that continued at the female officer's desk. Describing the altercation, which was said to have lasted a matter of seconds, the chairperson said: "He shouted at her" and approached "her in an intimidating manner" and that his actions were said to cause "intimidation and embarrassment" over a matter of "police policy".

The argument was said to have started before she was at her desk but that the tone was "abrupt" and "brusque". He then "placed himself close to her face" and "she had to put her hands up to create some space". After the argument the pair continued their day as normal. The woman's initial reaction was that it "was not a big deal but felt embarrassed".

The chairperson said that it was "not the officers intention to intimidate" and that there was no evidence the PC made any reference to her gender or sex. It was a "genuine disagreement between colleagues that led to an argument".

The other two matters related to attempts to hug the same woman. The first incident was said to have occurred on January 13, 2020. The panel heard two conflicting reports about the exact details surrounding the PC asking a female colleague for a hug outside their office. The dispute was over the timings of when he went in to hug her, and that he didn't stop when she pulled away.

The female PC said she regarded him as having a "reputation" as being "over friendly", "creepy and uncomfortable". Two months later when she was alone inside the office he again asked her for a hug. He put out his arms and she said no before walking away. He had already been warned about his behaviour.

The panel found he had failed to treat her with respect and courtesy but the chairperson said there was no motive of sexual gratification.

The panel found two of the allegations unproven; the argument and outdoor hug. The third, in the office, was proven but "but fell

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short of the threshold required for formal disciplinary action".

Surrey Police Headquarters in Mount Browne, near Guildford, hosted the police misconduct procedure between Monday, June 12, and Friday, June 16.

The male PC can not be named after his identity was protected by the committee chairperson to protect his welfare.

The hearing was brought by the Professional Standards Department as it felt there were cases to answer over potential breaches of authority, respect and courtesy, equality and diversity.

A spokesperson for Surrey Police said "thresholds for referral to disciplinary proceedings are necessarily set lower than that necessary to prove the misconduct, to ensure transparency in the police disciplinary regime."

During the course of the hearing, an application to withdraw certain allegations against the PC were also agreed.

Related report:

Anonymity for Surrey policeman

Ex MPC, now Epsom PPC, tackles Surrey PCs

Epsom and Ewell Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate and former Royal Military Police officer, **Helen Maguire**, is pushing Government to spend more on policing in Surrey given the "dire" state of policing in the County.

Using figures culled from various public sources by the LibDems, Ms Maguire points to the 1,412 burglaries that went unattended in Surrey last year, as another example ".... of the Conservative Government suggesting it is tough on crime with the facts telling a different story".

Figures uncovered by her Party show that of the 2,768 burglaries reported in Surrey, the police only arrived at the scene in 1356 instances – accounting for just 48.99% of cases. The number of unsolved burglaries in Surrey also soared, with 2195 cases being closed without a suspect even identified. This is equivalent to 79.3% of all cases.

The Liberal Democrats are calling for a new "Burglary Response Guarantee," which would create a guarantee that all domestic burglaries are attended by the police and properly investigated.

This will require a return to proper community policing, the LibDems urge – where officers are visible, trusted, and have the time and resources needed to focus on solving crime. Yet since 2015, Ms Maguire claims, the Conservatives have taken over 4,000 Police Community Support Officers off the streets, while they look set to have broken their key promise of having recruited an extra 20,000 police officers by the end of March 2023.

"The number of PCSOs has fallen to just 69 by the end of March – down from 136 PCSOs just over a year ago in February 2022. It's worse in **Epsom and Ewell** where we should have 8 and now have half of that number. That's hardly a good track record for a (Tory) Party which makes out to be supportive of policing! Hardly surprising then that so many burglaries in our community are not being attended by police officers. No family should be denied justice after suffering the distress and trauma of being burgled", said Ms Maguire.

"Car theft is also a scourge across the county with a staggering 79.2% of car thefts going unsolved last year with just 5.3% resulting in a charge or summons. Lib Dem analysis, based on the latest Home Office statistics on crime outcomes, showed that a grand total of 1503 car theft cases in Surrey were closed in 2022 without a suspect even being identified – equivalent to 4 car thefts going unsolved every day.

"The priorities of this government are clearly not on our public services with our police officers, like the NHS, being starved of resources. In such a dire situation, enough is enough – we need a change of regime – one that puts the focus on our communities, on law and order, and the health and wealth of our people," said Helen Maquire.

"Many families across Surrey now feel unsafe in their own homes, because this Conservative government has left our police forces overstretched and under-resourced. It means far too many victims are being denied justice and far too many criminals are getting away with it.

"Meanwhile, it has been revealed that the Surrey Police budget for 2022/23 was underspent by at least £7.9 million, enough to pay for the entire 5.1% council tax increase imposed by the Police and Chief Commissioner Lisa Townsend for 2023/24."

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Surrey Police responded to Ms Maguire's claims:

Exclusive to the Epsom and Ewell Times a spokesperson for Surrey Police rebuts the LibDem candidate's claims:

"We are committed to deploying officers to all home burglaries. We recognise how invasive and traumatic it can be to be a victim of burglary, and this is why we are already investing significant resources in preventing and tackling these offences, alongside providing the appropriate support and advice to victims.

Each of our three divisions in Surrey has its own proactive team that reviews all burglaries in that division. These teams monitor ongoing burglary trends and patterns, identify hot spot areas and target prolific and repeat offenders and organised crime networks to ensure that patrols are directed in a targeted and most effective way.

Changes to how burglaries are classified, which were introduced on 1 April 2023, will enable officers to give a greater focus on home burglaries and help to meet the NPCC pledge of attending all home burglaries.

Burglary offences had previously been divided into two categories of "residential" and "business and community". A residential burglary previously included sheds, garages, outhouses and summer houses, as well as the dwelling itself.

The changes will mean that residential burglaries are split into two categories – residential burglary of a home and residential burglary of an unconnected building. All sheds, outhouses and garages with no connecting door to the home will be classed as unconnected buildings.

Our figures show that we have solved 81 more offences than the previous 12 months and so far have had 125 less offences (106 less offences between April 2023 and today v April 2022 and June 14/06/22).

Work also remains ongoing to prevent burglaries from occurring in the first place by ensuring effective prevention measures are in place. Many of the residential burglaries reported are shed or garage break-ins and we continue to run awareness-raising campaigns in our local communities to remind homeowners of the steps they can take to avoid becoming a victim.

More advice on protecting your home/outbuildings from burglary can be found on our web site https://www.surrey.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/protect-home-crime/

In some cases, there may not be enough intelligence or positive lines of enquiry for police to act on. This does not mean that a crime is closed indefinitely or that intelligence or information is ignored. This information will be collated and monitored to identify emerging crime hotspots and any trends or patterns.

If an investigation is closed, and we then receive information to link an offender at a later date we will always pursue this to seek closure for victims.

The public can also help in the pursuit of offenders by reporting suspicious activity, and also by reporting to the police those selling stolen property or those involved in burglary offences via 101, by webchat on our website https://surrey.police.uk/online and https://www.surrey.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/cor/tell-us-about-existing-case-report/ or anonymously via the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Residents are also able to upload video footage and images that they think could assist our burglary investigations through the use of a public CCTV submission portal https://surrey.police.uk/suspiciousactivityportal "

And on the claims about reductions in PCSOs the police spokesperson continued:

"In 2022, to contribute to savings across the force, we reduced the number of Police Community Support Officers in Surrey Police to 96, 22 posts fewer than our previous staffing level of 118 full-time equivalent PCSOs. This reduction did not involve redundancies and achieving this staffing level did not result in a reduction in overall numbers in our Safer Neighbourhood Teams; we maintain a strong blended mix of police officers and PCSOs in these key frontline posts in every borough.

In September 2022, Surrey Police employed 88 PCSOs. This is lower than our desired number of PCSOs, so it is inaccurate to say that 35 PCSO roles have been cut by the Force. We are actively recruiting to bring our establishment level back up to 96.

We know how important a visible police team with local knowledge is to residents in each of our boroughs. A trusted, knowledgeable, and proactive local policing presence is just as important to us, and PCSOs are a valued and integral part of that."

Adding to the local force's rebuttal Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey **Lisa Townsend** said: "The suggestion that policing in the county is in a 'dire' state is once again entirely misleading – the reality is that Surrey Police is now the biggest it has ever been.

"The Force has not only met but exceeded its target for extra officers under the government's programme to increase numbers by 20,000 across the country. An extra 395 police officers have been added to the ranks since 2019 – this is 136 more than the target



ISSN 2753-2771

set by government for Surrey which is fantastic news for residents.

"Last year, in order to help achieve its savings target - Surrey Police made an operational decision to temporarily halt the recruitment of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). "These posts were replaced with new warranted officers and there were no redundancies or loss of numbers to Surrey Police's frontline teams.

"PCSOs continue to play a crucial role in policing our communities – recruitment has been reopened and the Force are seeking applications right now. We expect their numbers to back to the previous levels within three years.

"Over the last year, Surrey Police have achieved an increase in the number of residential burglaries solved and have since coupled this with a commitment to attend all reported house burglaries in Surrey. The outcome rate for residential burglary in Surrey remains above the national average.

"I'm proud that Surrey is the safest county in the south east, and the fourth safest county in the country."

What is your experience of policing in Epsom and Ewell? Write to us at Epsom and Ewell Times. Via the contact page or by email to admin@epsomandewelltimes.com